Special clothing and equipments for soldier at Siachen

3909. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that soldiers on the Siachen glacier are facing extreme hardship because of the army's repeated failure to provide them with special clothing and the equipment required to endure nature's fury at heights of over 21,000 feet;

(b) if so, the facts and details thereof;

(c) whether Government have taken/propose to provide special benefits and facilities to soldiers posted at the Siachen glacier; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) and (b) The soldiers posted at Siachen are being provided special clothing and equipment as per authorization. A total of 55 items of Special Clothing, Ski and Mountaineering Equipment are authorized to the troops posted at locations characterized by extreme cold climate conditions, including the Siachen Glacier. The quantities authorized in respect of these items have been increased by the Ministry of Defence in April 2005. After the increase, 27351 sets of equipment, and an equal quantity as reserve for contingencies, are authorized.

(c) and (d) Improvements in special benefits and facilities to soldiers posted at Siachen Glacier is an ongoing process. Armed Forces personnel posted in delineated areas of Siachen as on date receive 'Siachen Allowance' at the rate of Rs. 7000 per month for officers and Rs. 4667 per month for Personnel Below Officers Rank. The allowance is concurrently available with 'Highly Active Field Area Allowance', the rates of which vary from Rs. 1620 per month (For Naik/Sepoy & equivalent) to Rs. 4200 per month (For Lt. Col. and above). The personnel posted in Siachen Glacier are also authorized special ration, etc.

Cold wave beyond January, 2008

3910. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EARTH SCIENCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that cold wave continued beyond January 2008 in parts of North India;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;

(c) the States and Union Territories badly affected by cold wave and number of persons died of cold therein;

(d) wheher any compensation is proposed to be paid by Government to families of those died of cold wave;

(e) if so, details thereof; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF EARTH SCIENCES (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. There were two major cold wave spells over the country during January and February 2008 during 20th January to 2nd February and 7th—14th February.